

Wildlife Diversity News

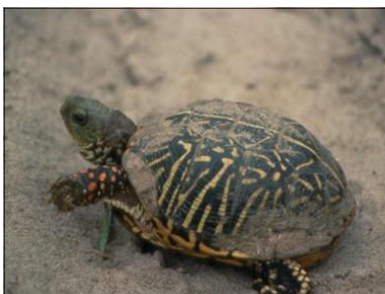
A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program

Volume 10, Issue 1

Spring 2011

2011: The Year of the Turtle

As we are well into the year 2011, many of us have long forgotten our ambitious New Year's resolutions and continued about our normal ways. A handful of dedicated people, however, may still be sticking to their guns and fighting hard to tackle that annual goal. The Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is among that special group, as they have chosen to dedicate the year 2011 to turtles—turtle conservation, to be precise. PARC has partnered with a large number of agencies, conservation groups, and educators to spread the word and raise awareness about the serious threats to turtle species worldwide. They have jump-started action towards finding real solutions to save declining populations.



(Top) Ornate box turtles are listed as a threatened species in Iowa. *Photo by The Nature Conservancy.* (Bottom) A painted turtle hatchling being measured as part of the state-wide Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring monitoring program. *Photo by Josh Otten.*

Many of you may be wondering, "Why fuss about turtles?!" They're everywhere--backyards, neighbors' ponds, crossing roads left and right. But don't be fooled! History has shown that overlooking species so "common" can be dangerous, as they can be faced with extinction and wiped clean from the earth before we even notice they've gone missing. According to PARC, the most quickly declining animal group on the planet is the turtles, with 50% of all turtle species now classified as threatened or endangered. While this is a global issue, the United States is a hot-spot for turtle conservation in that there are more endemic species in this country than any other in the world. An underlying goal of this conservation initiative led by PARC is to "preserve the rare species and keep the 'common species common,'" so a great importance lies in not only monitoring and protecting species on the brink of extinction, but also keeping tabs on those frequently encountered species to ensure their survival.

The greatest threats to turtle species are shared with a diversity of wildlife in need of



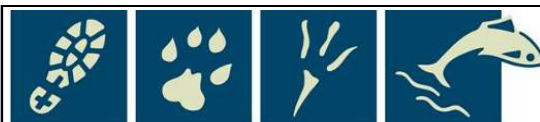
conservation, and those are of human influence--habitat loss and fragmentation, damages to habitat quality, and over-harvest for commercial use and the pet trade. The presence of many turtle species near developed and urbanized landscapes results in a high number of encounters with humans. This is one of the greatest detriments to these turtles, with vulnerability to mortality on roads bisecting habitat and nest-raids by predators well-adapted to disturbed landscapes. The long life span and late age at which they begin reproducing makes losing breeding individuals, from a population of turtles, especially difficult for these species to bounce back. It also puts more pressure on the already vulnerable hatchlings to survive long enough to reproduce.

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*Edited by:
Kristen Bredemeier*



TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE
a natural investment

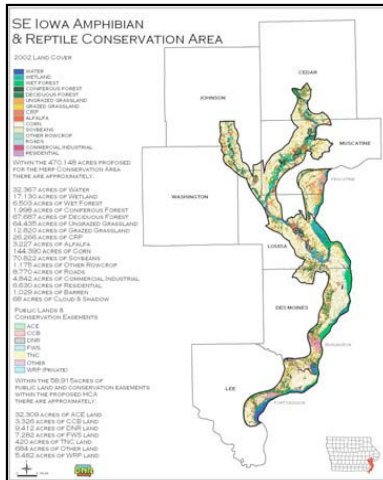
Iowa's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition

Over 230 groups working together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

Would your organization or business like to join the coalition? Go to www.teaming.com.

Year of the Turtle (Continued)

Continued from Page 1



A map of the first area dedicated to reptile and amphibian conservation in the United States, located in southeast Iowa.

Upon learning that PARC and partnering conservation groups are coining 2011 as the Year of the Turtle the Wildlife Diversity Program felt it necessary to aid in the propagation of these conservation efforts throughout Iowa. A large contributing factor to this call for action stems from the dedication of the SE Iowa Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Area. Just 4 years ago, the Iowa DNR with help from partnering organizations created this special area, the first of it's kind in the entire nation. The roughly 470,000 acre area is home to nearly every species of turtle found in Iowa, many of which are state threatened or endangered species, such as the ornate box turtle. Be sure to keep an eye out for educational events throughout the state promoting the Year of the Turtle and provid-

ing ways for you get involved with protecting Iowa's turtles.

So don't worry if you have nixed your work-out regime to shed that extra 10 pounds and use your excess time and energy to do your part for turtle conservation this year. Report sightings, volunteer to improve turtle habitat, and educate yourself on the needs of turtle populations on a local, state, national, and even global level. Most importantly, spread the word to others to develop real conservation practices that will keep our turtle species afloat.

-Kristen Bredemeier
Wildlife Diversity Outreach
Program Assistant, AmeriCorps

New Partnership Funds Important Prairie Chicken Work



Greater prairie chicken “booming” during a mating display at the Kellerton Grasslands
Photo by Lowell Washburn

In the late 19th century the Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido cupido*) was a popular and common game bird on Iowa's landscape. The 1950's saw the demise of this charismatic bird in the state with the last nesting attempt recorded in 1952. Roughly 30 years later efforts began to bring this iconic symbol of prairie grass-land back and while success has been questionable many positive and un-

expected things have arisen from this bird's return to Iowa.

Over the last few years renewed effort has taken place to determine the status of Iowa's small population with a genetics study and the establishment of a lek or booming ground survey. In 2010, the Wildlife Diversity Program was fortunate to be approached by a new partner – The Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines Iowa. The zoo was interested in getting involved with some local conservation projects and their new "Coins for Conservation" program gave them the opportunity. Coins for Conservation allows every visitor to donate 25 cents of their admission price to either a local, national or international conservation program. For the first three years of the program, the zoo has committed to donating the money to The Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Georgia Sea Turtle Center and of course Prairie Chicken Conservation!

For our first year of funding, the zoo has hired a prairie chicken habitat specialist on the diversity program's behalf. This position, filled by Chris Hansen, is performing a comprehensive assessment of prairie chicken habitat in the Kellerton

Continued on Page 3



Greater prairie chicken habitat
specialist Chris Hansen

Keep tabs on this year's habitat project by reading [Chris Hansen's Blog](http://www.blankparkzoo.com/en/news_blogs_webcams_media/prairie_chicken_blog/) :
http://www.blankparkzoo.com/en/news_blogs_webcams_media/prairie_chicken_blog/

Prairie Chicken Work (continued)

Continued from Page 2

Bird Conservation Area in Ringgold County. This assessment will provide us with crucial information that will help guide habitat management in the area and outline future plans for prairie chickens in Iowa.

So the next time you visit the Blank Park Zoo, make sure to use your coin to vote for Prairie Chicken Conservation in Iowa and be sure to thank the Blank Park Zoo for all their conservation efforts. Want more chickens? Come down to the

Kellerton Wildlife Area in Ringgold County on **April 9th** for the annual Prairie Chicken Festival – we'll be sipping coffee and watching the sun rise over dancing prairie chickens – there's nothing quite like it.

-Stephanie Shepherd
Surveys & Data Coordinator

Visit the Blank Park Zoo's website and watch a video about the *Coins for*

Conservation program at:

<http://www.blankparkzoo.com/en/conservation/>



IOWA'S WILDEST ADVENTURE

A Long-lived Red-tailed Hawk Story

During the fall of 1993, in cooperation with Mike Cox and the Iowa State University Wildlife Care Clinic student volunteers, Wildlife Diversity Program staff helped create a raptor banding station on a high grassy knoll along the Des Moines River. The first part of the plan was to trap and band raptors as they were migrating south in the fall. The second part of the plan was to retrieve data from the National Bird Banding Laboratory, as some of these banded birds of prey were recaptured or discovered and reported in the future. The target species for capture



These metal bands, issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are used to mark and identify raptors and other birds species. Pictured is an eagle with a band similar in appearance to the red-tailed hawk banded here in 1993.

Photo by Bruce Ehresman

was red-tailed hawk, and during the two fall field seasons of trapping, 150 red-tails were banded at the hilltop banding station. There were also 6 other bonus spe-

cies captured and banded, including 1 of 2 golden eagles, 1 peregrine falcon, 3 broad-winged hawks, 3 Coopers' hawks, 4 sharp-shinned hawks, and 1 American kestrel.

As expected, several band returns for red-tailed hawks came in within the first few years after the banding project ended. As I recall, no band returns originated very far away from the banding site. That is, until this last December. On December 8, 2010, Alan Lawson found a dead red-tailed hawk, with a silver numbered Fish & Wildlife Service leg band, apparently electrocuted by electric transmission lines near Jonesboro, Arkansas. He reported the hawk's band number to the National Banding Laboratory at Patuxent, Maryland. The banding lab then reported that band return to our office. It turns out this is a red-tailed hawk that was banded at our raptor banding station on September 27, 1993. At that time, the bird had been weighed and various body measurements taken, and it was determined that this was a juvenile (probably male) light-phase of the western race of red-tailed hawk.

While it is unfortunate that this raptor died because of an apparent poorly designed transmission line system, we



Light-phase of western red-tailed hawk morph.

have benefited from the information recorded on its leg band. For instance, we know this bird was nearly 18 years old, while an average life span for a red-tail is more like 6 or 7 years. And while it certainly

would have been useful to know where this bird originally hatched and where it nested thereafter, we at least now know that it appeared to be spending its last winter in NE Arkansas. This banded hawk also contributed to a larger batch of knowledge gained from the thousands of red-tailed hawks that have been banded and from which hundreds of band returns have been documented. It is from this larger set of hawk banding data that we derive a better understanding of the life history of the many races of this interesting and adaptable species.

-Bruce Ehresman
Avian Ecologist

News from the Frog Pond



Photo by Josh Otten

For those of you whom I haven't met, my name is Karen Kinkead and I am the new Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator (or, as I'm called around the Wallace Building "the new Doug"). I've been part of the Wildlife Diversity Program officially since 2006. As the Diversity Program's Monitoring & Research Biologist, my main responsibility was implementing the Multiple Species Inventory & Monitoring (MSIM) Program.

Doug Harr wrote a column for this newsletter titled "From the Catbird Seat" for many editions. Not being a birder, I've struggled for a more fitting title for this column for me. My background includes work with amphibians and reptiles, so maybe "News from the Frog Pond" will be appropriate. I admit I feel more like a small frog in a big pond than someone sitting in a Catbird Seat. In looking back through Doug's editions, I've realized that many of them revolved around the budget woes which wildlife conservation in general has faced over the years. We face these same issues yet again at both the state and federal levels.

As many of you know, the Wildlife Diversity Program has been able to grow for the last 5 years from a staff of 4 full time employees, to a staff of 6 full time employees and 3 AmeriCorps members. The Diversity Program has responsibilities state-wide, and tries to address the

needs of hundreds of species. The new positions have been funded through a combination of Federal money (both State Wildlife Grants and AmeriCorps Grants) and the Natural Resource License Plate funds. We have not been allowed to hire the Monitoring & Research Biologist position, so today we have a staff of 5 full time and 3 AmeriCorps members.

Along with the Chickadee check-off, those 3 sources of funding are critical for the Wildlife Diversity Program. The AmeriCorps Grant has allowed us to establish the Second Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas, increase volunteer participation in our Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Programs, support more public wildlife events and publish more informational brochures and newsletters. The State Wildlife Grants Program has enabled us to create the MSIM program (to date we have surveyed 120 public properties and 28 private properties for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, and dragonflies, and some of those properties for mussels and fish). SWG has also provided a means for us to partner with other organizations to conduct invaluable research on various species and to protect critical areas for non-game species.

We would not be able to utilize the Federal Grant programs without the funding match provided by our Natural Resource License Plate fund. We also use the Plate funds to support small grants programs for management and for research and education. The recipients for 2011 small grants programs are featured in a

later article in this newsletter. If you are one of the more than 38,000 people with a Natural Resource License Plate, we thank you! Your support of our program is crucial.

Our volunteers are also essential to the success of the Diversity Program. We have programs in place for monitoring colonial waterbirds, bald eagles and other raptors, frogs and toads, and our breeding bird atlas. If you wish to become involved, you can find more information on our websites. If you are a volunteer, we thank you, these programs would not exist at all without your support.

This is the next to last year of the Breeding Bird Atlas. We still have so much work to do to make this project a success. Last year our goal was to have every BBA Block visited and we met that goal. This year, we want to have every block reach the 5-hour effort category. This will take a huge amount of work from our volunteers. You do not need to be an expert birder to get involved in this, even if you can only identify Canada Geese, American Robins, and Ring-necked Pheasants, please participate as every piece of information helps.

Lastly, I'd like to encourage you to visit the Blank Park Zoo. The Zoo has partnered with the Wildlife Diversity Program to raise awareness of the Greater Prairie Chicken in Iowa.

-Karen Kinkead

Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator



An End to the Non-Game Certificate Era

The 2011 non-game support certificate is now available! The purchase of this numbered collectible print supports the state Wildlife Diversity Program and wildlife conservation in Iowa. This year's certificate features a beautiful male cardinal image taken by Stan Buman. This will be the final year the certificate will be offered - marking 32 years of annual non-game support certificates. To better see the certificate and get more information you can visit www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/divsupport01.html. They are also available for purchase at The Nature Store - www.iowa-nature-store.com.



Meet the New WDP Staff

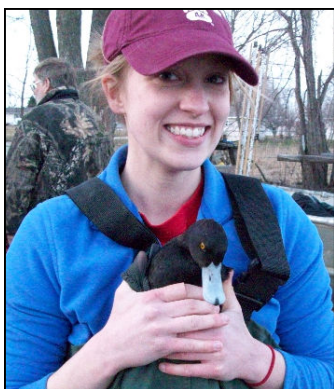
Bridie Nixon

The Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program has a new addition! Bridie Nixon brings a great deal of experience to her new position with the DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. A native of Clinton, Iowa, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology from St. Ambrose University in 2008. For the last two years she's been busy studying the roosting ecology of the Northern Long-eared Myotis for her Master's degree in Biology from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Bridie will be helping coordinate VWMP so that we can do a better job communicating with and providing service to our volunteers.



Kristen Bredemeier

Kristen, originally from Kansas City, Missouri, is a recent graduate of Iowa State University where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology and Animal Ecology. While earning her degree, she spent 2 years on staff at the ISU Wildlife Care Clinic working as a Wildlife Rehabilitator and giving live raptor presentations for the public. More recently, she worked for Story County Conservation as a Summer Naturalist, developing and leading various programs and summer camps for children. She found her way into the Wildlife Diversity Program (WDP) in November 2010 as an AmeriCorps member and the new Outreach Program Assistant. Her responsibilities include creating educational materials to distribute to the public, attending public events, and performing an assortment of odd-jobs under the WDP's umbrella to help accomplish the program's projects and goals. In short, she is here to help wherever she is needed and believes her future involvement in the program will be just as exciting as her experience thus far.



2011-2012 Approved Small Grant Proposals

Small Research and Education Grants

Distribution of the Plains Pocket Mouse in the Loess Hills of Iowa

-University of Nebraska at Omaha-

The Lepidoptera of Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

-Drake University-

Nahant Marsh Turtle Monitoring Program

-River Action

Roosting Behavior of Eastern Pipistrelles and Little Brown Bats in Iowa Caves

-Iowa Grotto of the National Speleological Society-

Survey of Mammals and Reptiles at Five Ridge Prairie Wildlife Management Area

-Morningside College-

Habitat Management Grants

Savanna and Prairie Restoration at Robison Wildlife Area

-Story County Conservation-

Land stewardship Intern Program

-Iowa Natural Heritage Program-

Each year the Wildlife Diversity Program awards funds to a number of entities through two smaller grants programs. The Small Grants Program gives a maximum of \$2500 for small research or education projects. The Management Grants Program provides a maximum of \$7500 for habitat management projects that encourage a diversity of wildlife species, particularly species of greatest conservation need. These programs utilize funds raised through the sale of Natural Resource License Plates and donations through the Chickadee Check-off on the state tax form.

Both of these grants programs recently announced their awards for 2011. The winning grant proposals are selected based on merit, relatedness to WDP goals, available budget, and compliance to request guidelines. The projects approved for this year's funding, listed to the left, will assess conservation needs and provide habitat for a variety of non-game species across the state—from butterflies and bats to pocket mice and turtles. Thank you to all who submitted a proposal and to those who have either contributed to the Natural Resource License Plate fund or supported the Chickadee Check-off. If you'd like to find out more about our grants programs and see an RFP visit our website: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/grants.html>

SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN IOWA.

NEW! **NEW!** **NEW!** **NEW!** **NEW!** **NEW!**

BUY A NATURAL RESOURCE PLATE.

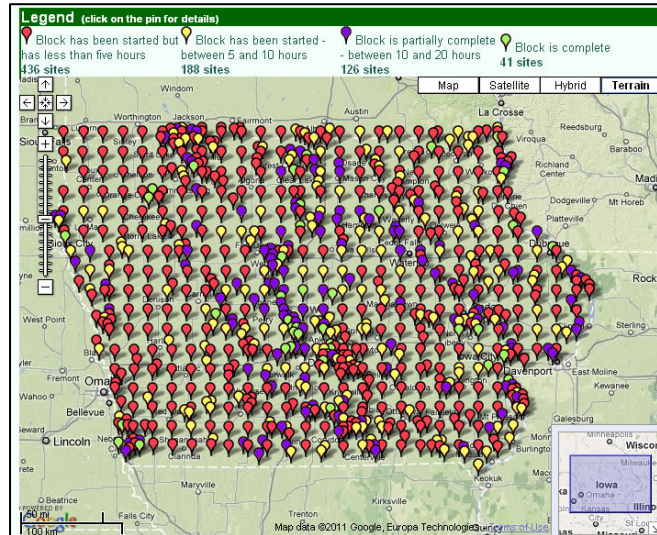
22% of the original purchase price and 60% of the renewal fee for natural resource license plates go directly to the Wildlife Diversity Program.

BBAII Update: Birding with a Purpose - Season Four Begins!

Spring is finally here! I don't know about you, but ever since the end of August last year I have been counting down the days until the 2011 atlasing season. Last year we reached the impressive milestone of visiting all 791 blocks and we bumped the list of potential breeders up to 191 species! Now it seems that everyday a new bird species arrives from the south, beckoning us to once again take up our binoculars and go atlasing. By mid-April, almost 60 species will be displaying breeding behavior and by mid-May the number will be over 130 species. So in other words, now is the time to begin collecting data for Iowa's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA).

The BBA is a five year project that started in 2008 and continues through 2012, where volunteers search for evidence of birds nesting throughout the state. This information will be used by biologists, landowners, and the public to enhance our understanding of these species, their breeding range, and their habitat selection.

Statewide, volunteers have logged over 5,130 hours of observation, but with only 41 blocks completed we have a long way to go to reach our goals. To focus our efforts for 2011, the progress com-



An updated Breeding Bird Atlas map depicting progress completion by atlas block. Progress is based on how many hours of effort (observation by volunteers) have been recorded in each block.

pletion map on the website has been revised. Red pins now represent blocks with less than 5 hours of effort, yellow pins represent blocks with between 5 and 10 hours of effort and blue and green pins remain the same. This year we should especially target the 436 blocks with less than 5 hours of recorded effort. After all, this data is crucial for the conservation and management of Iowa's wonderful birdlife.

Mark your calendars! This summer, the Iowa Ornithologists' Union and the Iowa

Department of Natural Resources will be hosting four BBA Block-busting Weekends around the state. Each weekend will begin with a presentation about the BBA on Friday evening. Volunteers will learn how to participate, how to determine breeding bird status, and how to turn in observations. During Saturday and Sunday, volunteers will be out in blocks searching for nesting birds. See the event calendar on the last page of this newsletter for regions and dates. For more information on the blockbusting weekends and atlasing, or to view up-to-date progress, either contact me or check out the website at: <http://bba.iowabirds.org>. I can't wait to see what we accomplish this year.

Happy Birding!

-Billy Reiter-Marolf
BBA Volunteer Coordinator, AmeriCorps
1436 255th Street
Boone, IA 50036
(515) 432-2823 ext. 117
Cell: (515) 298-3072
bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org

*To learn more and join the effort,
go to: <http://bba.iowabirds.org/>*



Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program Update

This is our first year assigning volunteers to eagles nests. We hope to have 50% of the eagle nests in the state monitored by volunteers. It is important to know the status of these birds so that we can be aware of and quickly work against any declines. The frog and toad survey, in one form or another, has been conducted every spring for over twenty years. It is especially important now as frogs are facing threats on multiple fronts - Chytrid, pollution, climate change, etc. We are thrilled at the enthusiasm and participation of so many volunteers. See the Events Calendar at the end of this newsletter for up and coming frog and toad survey workshop dates.

-Bridie Nixon
Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program Coordinator, AmeriCorps

Attention Bluebird Enthusiasts!

Story County Conservation and Iowa Bluebird Conservationists (IBC) are hosting a **Bluebird Conference, April 23, 10AM – 4 PM**. Lunch – Please bring a potluck dish to share – main course will be provided (free will donations accepted) or bring your own lunch. There will be a vegetarian option or feel free to bring your own lunch if you like. Dean Biechler, local artist and long time bluebirder will keynote gathering at 10AM. Don Poggensee will present over lunch. Then Carl Kurtz will present at 1:30PM. This event is always well attended with plenty of opportunity to share successes or concerns with bluebirders from around the state. You can **contact Carol Williams at (515) 232-2516 or cwilliams@storycounty.com**. The Story County Conservation Center is located at 56461 180th Street, about 4 miles north east of Ames. Please RSVP to Story County Conservation by calling **515-232-2516** or by email **conservation@storycounty.com** by 4 p.m. Monday, April 17 if at all possible.



Male Eastern bluebird after catching an insect.
Photo by Jay Gilliam

Species Spotlight: Smooth Softshell Turtle

Iowa is blessed with over 19,000 miles of creeks, streams, and rivers that harbor an amazing variety of fish and wildlife species. Aquatic turtles are a group of organisms that rely on healthy streams and their associated riparian habitat to grow and thrive. The smooth softshell turtle, *Apalone mutica*, is an uncommon species that lives in Iowa's larger and higher quality streams and rivers. Iowa is also home to the spiny softshell turtle, *Apalone spinifer*, which is a much more common species. Smooth softshells have no spines or bumps on their carapace and they do not have a ridged nostril like the spiny softshell. Smooth softshells are also quite docile unlike spiny softshells which will usually bite when provoked.

Both softshell turtles are highly specialized for life in the water. They have very flat carapaces that are covered in a leathery skin instead of bony scutes like other turtles. In fact, they are often called leatherbacks because of this trait. Softshell turtles have webbed feet for strong swimming and a long neck that allows them to surface for air without exposing the rest of their body. One of their more interesting characteristics is that while underwater they can obtain a high percentage of their oxygen through their skin and cloaca.

Smooth softshell turtles live in large rivers and streams with sandy bottoms and extensive sand and gravel bars. They can be found basking on the edge of bars, but will sprint into the water at the slightest hint of danger. Smooth softshells feed primarily on aquatic insects and other invertebrates, but will take other animals and even seeds or fruits at times. They often bury themselves in the sandy river bottom just deep enough that they can stretch their neck and poke their nostrils above the waterline for a breath. Females, which are larger than males, lay 1-2 clutches of eggs on sandbars in June and July. Clutches take up to 70 days to hatch and can withstand up to 24 hours of flooding before showing a decrease in survival. Softshell turtles exhibit genetic sex determination in which the gender of young does not depend on nest temperature. This differs from most turtles which have temperature dependent sex determination, with males and females being produced at



Smooth Softshell Turtle. Photo by Rich Mennenoh

different nest temperatures.

Smooth softshell turtle numbers have declined in Iowa, probably because they seem to prefer large river systems with high water quality and less channel disturbance. Most of Iowa's streams and rivers have been modified through channelization, straightening, damming, and removal of the riparian vegetation and wetlands. This type of habitat degradation is very harmful to our aquatic species and, when compounded by poor water quality, can result in the extirpation of species from Iowa. Smooth softshells are a fascinating member of Iowa's aquatic wildlife community and will benefit from efforts to improve our impaired water resources.

-Paul Frese
Wildlife Diversity Technician II



Turtle sampling on Cedar River for Multiple Species Inventory Project.
Photo by Paul Frese



A similar species often confused with the smooth softshell turtle, the spiny softshell, basking on a log. Photo by Roger Hill

Logarithmic Spiral and Falcon Flight

In 2010, fifteen peregrine falcon pairs were successful at 11 sites, producing 22 young around the state. Iowans are increasingly entertained by their falcons in flight. As a speck in the sky at four thousand feet, a falcon will turn-about, folding its long wings. The bird becomes a bi-ionic missile with anatomical attributes to do what it does, and how it does it, very well. Nictitating membranes rise from lower eyelids to protect its eyes from dust or windblown seeds. Cartilaginous baffles in its nasal cavities ensure the back of its skull is not blown out from its velocity. When diving at prey straight-ahead from great distance, at great speed exceeding 250 mph, a peregrine has a conflict between vision and aerodynamics: it must turn its head approximately 40 degrees to

one side to see the prey. Doing this, maximum visual acuity at the deep fovea of one eye is achieved, but

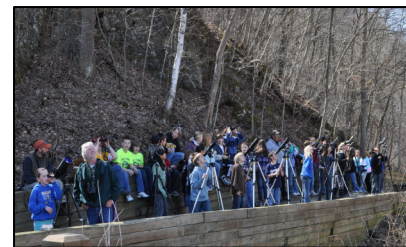
Typical Peregrine Falcon flight posture during dives upwards of 250 mph! Photo by Lowell Washburn



the head in this position increases aerodynamic drag and slows the falcon down. The falcon could resolve this conflict by holding its head straight and flying along a logarithmic spiral path that keeps the line of sight of the deep fovea pointed sideways at the prey. A wild peregrine, observed with binoculars, telescopes and a tracking device, indeed, approached prey the size of a pigeon from distances of up to 4,500 feet by holding its head straight and flying along a curved path that resembles the logarithmic spiral.

Its prey is dispatched in a poof of feathers and, in the case of larger prey like a duck, is ridden to the shore. Its beak is specifically notched to separate the vertebrae of its quarry in a most efficient manner. Ensuing feeding frenzy is unlike any spectacle of spearing flesh, tendons and muscle with feathers flying in a spray of mortal being that anyone could ever witness. It certainly sustains the peregrine's vitality until the next extraordinary spectacle unfolds.

Falcon aerial displays and courtship calling are increasing among the cliffs of their historic nesting range in NE Iowa. Last year three nesting pairs from Clinton Co. north to the state's border pro-



Spectators viewing peregrine falcons through binoculars and spotting scopes at the Bunge North American elevator in McGregor, IA.

Photo by Pat Schlarbaum

duced eight young. This year the public is invited to see the falcon pair at Bunge North American elevator in McGregor, Iowa on April 9. Parking is located just west of the elevator and a walkway provides access to a viewing platform at the base of the cliff. Falcon enthusiasts will be on hand with spotting scopes and plenty of information to share about this most unique raptor – the standard bearer of the endangered species act – silent no longer. These birds have returned to the historic cliffs and urban settings of NE Iowa and their courtship calls are resonating the return of these birds to the greatest flyway on the planet – the Mississippi Flyway.

–Pat Schlarbaum
Wildlife Diversity Technician II

How 'Bout Those Eagles?

It has been a great year for bald eagles in Iowa! Several Bald Eagle Days events took place throughout the state between January and March with a wonderful showing of bald eagles and an equally impressive attendance by the public. Events in Clinton, Keokuk, Quad Cities, Effigy Mounds, Saylorville, and Lake Red Rock averaged 40-50 eagles visible from viewing sites and anywhere from 450 viewers at Saylorville to 20,000 in attendance at the Quad Cities weekend-long expo!

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, a cooperative effort that involves surveying over 1700 miles of riverine habitat in 46 counties, yielded very positive results with just over 3600 eagles counted—a third of which were juveniles. Not only was the

overall number of eagles higher than in the previous 2 years, but the number of immature eagles counted was the highest since 2008. Another emerging trend observed in this year's survey was the prevalence of eagles on the Des Moines River, where nearly 2000 (~54%) of the eagles were counted. The Mississippi River, which historically has supported the highest concentration of wintering eagles in Iowa, was the second most important wintering river, where just under 850 eagles (~23%) were counted. Weather patterns and food availability appear to be significant factors affecting eagle distribution and numbers, and while these results are highly variable over the years, the general trend is that the wintering eagle population is increasing. While 296 active nests and 181 other

known territories (2010 data) indicates Iowa's eagle nesting population is doing extremely well, the Wildlife Diversity Program will continue to coordinate efforts to monitor Iowa's bald eagle population and nesting status to ensure a promising future of bald eagles in our state.

–Kristen Bredemeier
Wildlife Diversity Outreach
Program Assistant, AmeriCorps

Watch The Raptor Resource Project's
live-streaming video of an *active bald*
eagle nest in Decorah, IA by visiting:
www.ustream.tv/decorah eagles

Last Look

An unusually colored red-tailed hawk both perched and in flight. This condition is called leucism and refers to reduced reduced pigmentation in the skin and feathers of a bird. Contrastingly, albinism is a lack of all pigmentation, yielding a completely white individual with pink to red eyes. Because this individual has the same dark eye color as a typical red-tailed hawk, and retains pigmentation on the red tail feathers and markings on the underside of the wings it is considered leucistic.

Photos by Tom Lyle



A Publication of the:



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Events Calendar

Frog and Toad Survey Workshops

April 6— Crawford County Conservation, Yellow Smoke Parks Environmental Education Center, 2237 Yellow Smoke Road, Denison, IA
5:30pm -9:00pm

April 7th— Warren County Conservation, Annett Nature Center, 15565 118th Ave., Indianola, IA
5:30pm — 9:00pm

April 13th— Wapello County Conservation Pioneer Ridge Nature Center; 1339 Highway 63, Bloomfield, IA
5:30pm -9:00pm

Prairie Chicken Festival

April 9: Kellerton Wildlife Area
Ringgold county

Peregrine Falcon Viewing

April 9: Bunge North American Elevator
McGregor, IA

Story County Bluebird Conference

April 23: Story County Conservation
Story County Conservation Center, McFarland Park, 56461 180th Street Ames, IA
10:00 am—4:00 pm

2011 Blockbusting Weekends

June 24-26: Rathbun Lake
Appanoose, Lucas, Monroe, and Wayne counties

July 8-10: Northeastern Iowa
Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, and Winneshiek counties

July 22-24: Northwestern Iowa
Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Lyon, Osceola, and Palo Alto counties

July 29-31: Southwestern Iowa
Fremont, Mills, Montgomery, Page, and Pottawattamie counties

Wild Words of Wisdom

*"There are some who can live
without wild things and some
who cannot."
—Aldo Leopold*